



# Criminal Justice Knowledge Bank

An initiative of the Division of Criminal Justice Services



## Onondaga County: Chronic Offender Recognition and Enforcement Program (CORE 2.0)

### Practitioner:

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### Summary:

Onondaga County addresses gun violence in the City of Syracuse through an intensive, coordinated focus on chronic, violent offenders.

### Problem

2016 marked Syracuse's worst year in gun violence in a decade. From 2014 to 2016, there was a 36 percent increase in shootings (94 to 128). A local analysis revealed that 44 percent of these shootings involved gang and group members.

Since 2008, Onondaga County has used an offender-focused policing strategy to identify, monitor and prosecute chronic, violent offenders in the city of Syracuse. While the purpose of this strategy was to focus enforcement efforts on specific, chronic offenders, further analysis showed that the number of contacts between those individuals and police was no more frequent than between police and individuals not identified as chronic offenders. To address the increase in gun violence, the city needed to modify its offender-focused strategy.

### Program Description

In 2017, with the assistance of a research partner, Onondaga County revised its offender-focused strategy to strengthen communication, coordination and focus among law enforcement agency partners through the creation of the Chronic Offender Recognition and

Enforcement program (CORE (2.0)), a program which was locally designed to manage Onondaga County's offender-focused policing strategy, facilitate discussion among agency partners, and ensure accountability.

Bi-weekly meetings, co-chaired by a chief assistant district attorney from the Onondaga County District Attorney's Office and deputy chief of the Syracuse Police Criminal Investigations Division, are attended by representatives from the police department, District Attorney's Office, the Onondaga County Sheriff's Office, the Onondaga County Probation Department, the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, and federal probation.

During meetings, individuals identified as chronic, violent offenders are assigned to one of the partner agencies, which serves as the primary agency responsible for contacting and gathering intelligence on the individual and coordinating enforcement actions. Agencies are assigned these individuals based on several factors, including their supervision status, the location of their crimes, and the agency's familiarity with them. This pairing keeps the individual in

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constant contact with one or more of the partner agencies to discourage further criminal behavior. This contact also continually reinforces the message the individual received through a custom notification, delivered in-person by members of the Syracuse Police, probation or parole, and an outreach coordinator, who advises the individual of available services.

While one agency is assigned primary responsibility for an individual, all partners work together to plan enforcement actions. These operations can vary based on the enforcement actions an agency can implement. For instance, police officers conduct proactive street enforcement, including vehicle and pedestrian stops. The District Attorney's Office is responsible for prosecution if a stop leads to an arrest, and cases are prioritized and discussed at separate bi-weekly meetings between the assistant district attorney handling the case and the CORE 2.0 meeting co-chair from the office. Many CORE individuals are under parole or probation supervision, which allows for increased home visits, drug tests, GPS monitoring and violation enforcement.

The Onondaga Crime Analysis Center, with the assistance of a research partner, developed a data-collection method used by each partner to report on their offender-focused operations. This information is submitted to the Center and included in a summary report distributed prior to each meeting, where partner agencies report on the status of their efforts with each individual. The information shared includes criminal activity, number of contacts, addresses and other updates that help enhance the focus given to these individuals. Through this process, information is shared directly with representatives of each partner agency, resulting in better coordination of resources, improved accountability, and increased pressure on CORE individuals to stop engaging in violent crime.

### **Relevant Partnerships**

Onondaga County worked closely with a research partner, the John F. Finn Institute for Public Safety, to establish this program. The Finn Institute attends the meetings and provides regular input regarding

meeting content, observations and any relevant updates in research.

### **Program Reviews or Evaluations**

In February 2018, the Finn Institute completed a process evaluation to assess fidelity to the program design and offer recommendations. Since assigning chronic offenders to a specific partner agency to ensure enhanced attention is a main component of the strategy, researchers suggested that successful implementation of the strategy would be associated with increased enforcement.

The first part of the assessment compared enforcement actions on these individuals from July 2016 through June 2017, prior to implementation, to actions after implementation, July 2017 through December 2017. Results showed a 41 percent increase in arrests, indictments, and convictions involving chronic offenders post-implementation.

The second part of the assessment compared enforcement actions involving CORE individuals to individuals with similar criminal histories who are not the focus of law enforcement attention. Individuals who were targeted as part of the offender-focused strategy had increased arrests for violent and weapon offenses and were stopped 2.3 times more than the non-CORE individuals to whom they were compared. CORE individuals also received more home visits and drug tests, and were more often subject to violations of probation, indictments and convictions.

The Finn Institute also conducted an impact evaluation of CORE 2.0 in 2021. Researchers found that being identified as a CORE individual reduced violent victimizations (excluding domestic victimizations) by an estimated 45 percent, even if the individual was no longer identified as a CORE individual by law enforcement. Additionally, researchers found that individuals under community supervision also saw reductions in violent victimization if they had been considered a CORE individual at some point.

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## Supportive Research

The [Philadelphia Policing Tactics Experiment](#) examined the effectiveness of offender-focused policing strategies in hot spots identified by the Philadelphia Police Department. A randomized controlled trial tested three approaches to hot-spots policing: offender-focused policing, foot patrol and problem-oriented policing. Researchers found hot spots that received offender-focused policing produced a 42 percent reduction in violent crime relative to the control areas that were patrolled as usual by police officers. In addition, violent felony crimes were 50 percent lower in the offender-focused policing areas compared with the control areas.

## Critical Success Factors

The offender-focused policing strategy encourages ongoing collaboration among intelligence analysts and police. The three major components are the focus on chronic offenders, full participation and cooperation among the partner agencies, and execution of the CORE 2.0 strategy by field units.

- Accurately identifying chronic violent offenders through a non-biased selection process is the key to the offender-focused strategy. Continually examining the methods employed in this process and refining the criteria ensures that the strategy is targeting individuals that are criminally active.
- Full participation and cooperation among the partner agencies is essential. Agencies must commit to the goal of reducing gun violence and devote the resources necessary to identify crime problems and support reduction efforts through enforcement actions.
- Buy-in from officers in the field who work directly with chronic offenders and conduct the offender-focused operations ensures that the appropriate

message is delivered to the appropriate individuals who are responsible for gun violence.

## Lessons Learned

- Accurately identifying chronic violent offenders within the community is difficult and methods employed to identify those individuals need to be routinely evaluated and refined.
- Constant contact with chronic offenders is labor-intensive for the assigned field unit and the partners, and maintaining the level of effort within the group is difficult. Ensuring every unit in every partner agency plays a part in the strategy and integrating it into daily operations is key. Communication and accountability are critical to ensuring agencies have sufficient resources.
- All partners must be equally responsible for the continual contact with chronic offenders, even if they are not assigned to the individual. All partner agencies must make every effort to contact those individuals identified for enhanced attention and keep pressure on these individuals to cease criminal behavior.

## Additional Comments

From March through August 2020 CORE 2.0 meetings were suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Beginning in August, meetings were mostly virtual until Spring 2021 when they resumed in-person. Enforcement actions were also curtailed during the pandemic due to changes in probation and parole practices. Service connections declined during this period but were still offered when possible. The court system continued to offer virtual and occasional in-person appearances. As of the Spring of 2021, operations were transitioning back to pre-pandemic status.

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